

Independent art is a lifestyle and attitude that strives to keep commercialism and mainstream society at a distance.

The artists, directors and musicians featured in this issue are people who were born in the 1970s and 1980s, but who rejected the financial incentives and stability of mainstream work to pursue their own callings.

Independence is their attitude; creativity is their life.

Indie

attitude

How a blind singer sees modern China

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Indie designer returns to shape fashion

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# Voice from the Web

## Sandwich generation tells its stories through e-zines

By Huang Daohen

China publishes a whopping 9,500 magazines across the nation.

Unfortunately, if you were to hang them all up on the wall, it would be very hard to find any differences. All the magazine covers lead with big photographs of stars, fashion and gossip. The inside content is equally uninspired.

That's why some young people are devoting their time to creating alternative digital magazines to record the stories that appeal to their own generation.

### Sandwich generation

Taming a three-year-old toddler is a full-time job in itself, but it is not even half of the responsibilities Li Lin bears.

Li, a 32-year-old engineer at a local IT company, is also the sole support of his 65-year-old mother, who has shared his 90-square-meter home since a stroke in 2008.

Last year, Li also took in his widowed mother-in-law.

"It has been difficult. I didn't expect this would all come at once," Li said. "It's like suddenly you become the man of the house and have to care for everyone."

Li isn't the only one feeling the squeeze.

The country is seeing an increasing number of adults, who like Li were born around 1980 and are now struggling to support their own families as well as their parents.

Li Zixin, a consultant at a US firm's Shanghai branch, calls it China's "sandwich generation." In addition to his day job, Li, a world bank scholar and political writer, moonlights as head and co-founder of *China Sandwich*, an online magazine at china30s.com.

Unlike their same-named peers in the US, China's sandwich generation is experiencing a very different social metamorphosis: it didn't endure the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, but has ridden an economic boom through most of their lives.

Labeled as apathetic, selfish or money worshippers, they used to be a spoiled generation. Problems like lacking the will to endure hardship and changing jobs frequently were common among them.

But today, they are the nation's primary workforce.

### Online magazine

Li writes under the pen name of Kung-Fu Tea. Since March, he has been publishing with his liked-mind friends from media, NGOs and business vendors on *China Sandwich*.

The website has found a niche in the community through its features on contemporary phenomena like fast urbanization, single child, naked marriage, left-over women and young people's business ventures.

It pledges to cover social issues and topics that concern 30- to 40-year-olds who have found themselves stuck in the sandwich generation.

As of press time, as many as 100,000 readers have visited the site.

But maintaining an online magazine is not easy. Neither the editors nor the contributing authors are paid for their work.

They stay motivated because the work is interesting and meaningful, Li said.

Shirley Chen, the magazine's co-founder and editor of the social section, agreed. The 28-year-old spends her day hours working for an UK publication.

From an early age, she showed an interest in Chinese social development and media. After finding work with a mainstream media group, Chen



The co-founders

Photo provided by Shirley Chen

**"Individuals are given fewer chances to express themselves in mainstream media, let alone bring about change in the world. Online platform, however, may be a way out."**

took a personal interest in how Chinese society is developing and being influenced by global economic and foreign values.

But those stories don't sell, and Chen said some publications in the country are too afraid of government restrictions to explore these topics.

"They see propaganda mandates and funding as more important than the stories of individuals," she said. "Individuals are given fewer chances to express themselves in mainstream media, let alone bring about change in the world."

Online platform may be a way out, Chen said.

### Combating censorship

Magazines, like other publications, require official licensing to be published.

But the voice of celebrity blogger Hong Huang seems to be an exception.

Hong, the publisher of *iLook*, *Time Out Beijing* and *Time Out Shanghai*, said she doesn't want to do business the Chinese way.

Hong ran reports about gays and lesbians in *Time Out Beijing*. She then turned to topics about human rights and social development, which allowed her to weasel past.

In China, as in most countries, the view looks quite different when seen from outside the mainstream, Hong said.

### Other magazines

These days, there seem to be magazines for every profession, hobby and interest. There are some indie magazines started by young people who have a passion for literature, education and entertainment.



### Literary Life Weekly

This magazine focuses on the country's contemporary art, with bi-weekly updates and reports on music, theater, movies, culture and reading. It was created by young art enthusiasts He Pan and Yuan Ye in 2010. The magazine is free to download at zhoukan.cc. There is an App Store version available for iPhone and iPad.



### 48x15

48x15 is a new online magazine about fixed-gear bicycles, music, cheap living and fashion. It is bilingual and can be downloaded at peoplebike.cn.



### Play

*Play* is a one-man indie zine edited by Xiamen-based designer Dong Pan. Dong is also the founder of *Nothing.cn*. The magazine advocates a "quality of life" concept and calls on readers to return to simpler, cleaner living.

The magazine is available on Taobao for 10 yuan.



### Snacks

*Snacks*, a sister publication of *Art World*, is an experimental visual arts magazine. The founders say they came up with the idea to create the publication while eating snacks. Fun, light-hearted and trendy, the magazine aims for simple sharing of art.



# The world through poem and song

By He Jianwei

With dark glasses and black shoulder-length hair, singer and songwriter Zhou Yunpeng is one of the most influential folk musicians on the mainland.

The blind musician's compositions possess a penetrating power that cuts straight to the heart of even the most bitter cynic.



**Z**hou has been busy touring Hong Kong and Taiwan. Performing is his livelihood, and he jokingly refers to himself as a "migrant singer."

Born in 1970 in Liaoning Province, Zhou lost his sight at age 9. His childhood memories consist of trips with his mother to the hospital to consult doctors about his deteriorating vision. The last thing he remembers seeing is an elephant playing the harmonica with his trunk.

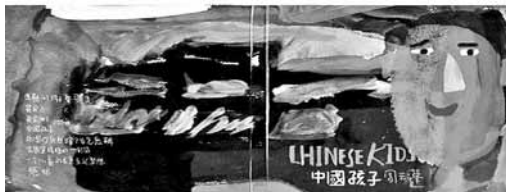
At 10, Zhou began attending a school for the blind in Shenyang. He went on to study at a high school in Tianjin, where he had his first music class.

Zhou hoped at first to learn the erhu, but the wailing noises

"Caring about social issues is part of caring about myself. As a blind man, I'm at the bottom of society."



Zhou Yunpeng performing at Nine Theater



Zhou's second album, Chinese Kids

Photos provided by U Studio

of the instrument in his inexperienced hands motivated him to switch to guitar.

After high school, he entered Changchun University as a student of Chinese in 1991. He did not choose to study music, because the school's only music department focused on classical works: the young Zhou was a pop fan. He

hoped instead to become a writer and poet.

But writing is a hard way for a blind man to make a living. Zhou decided to come to Beijing and earn money as a bar singer in 1997. In those days, the only avenue for people to hear his songs was very limited airplay on local radio stations.

Things changed in 2004, when Zhou released *The Breath as Silent as a Riddle*, his debut album under Modern Sky Records. The power of the Internet helped many people discover Zhou's music.

The album included an autobiographical song, "The Blind Man's Cinema." In the lyrics, he compares the world to a fictional film about a boy who loses his eyesight at the age of 9. The boy lives in a theater for the blind, where he listens to the stories that play on the screen.

"He imagines learning to play guitar, sing and write poetry. He takes his guitar on a journey and sings everywhere in the country," he wrote.

As part of his Chinese studies, Zhou read poetry. His favorite poet is Haizi, one of the most important poets since the Cultural Revolution, and is a fan of the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

In 2007, Zhou put "September," one of Haizi's poems, to music on his second album *Chinese Kids*.

The album contains many songs that make observations about the modern world, including lamentations about the high cost of Beijing housing.

"Caring about social issues is part of caring about myself. As a blind man, I'm at the bottom of society," Zhou said.

Last year, he released *Cattle and Lamb Going Down the Mountain*, a new album which puts Tang Dynasty (618-907) poems by Li Bai and Du Fu to music.

The release of that album brought Zhou a lot of criticism for having "abandoned the indie spirit." But Zhou said anger and frustration with the world should not be one's permanent state.

"Being angry all the time won't help you live longer. The normal state of the mind should be one of peace," he said.

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# The rise of electronic music

By Wei Xi

Like anything new, electronic music faces obstacles on its way toward acceptance in China.

Miao Wong, one of the founders of the electronic music label Acupuncture Records, fights an uphill battle trying to get ordinary people to pay attention to her style of music, but she's making progress.

"Ten years ago when you asked someone to name one or two famous rock 'n' roll bands, few people could do it. This is what the stage electronic music is at now," she said.

Difficulties abound. Chinese people have a bad impression of electronic music, Wong said. Many go to nightclubs not for the music, but the drinks and dancing. Clubs pay scant attention to the quality of their musical selections, and DJs are rarely given free rein.

"DJs in Beijing's nightclubs cannot play the music they like, but have to obey the boss' orders, playing the same disc over and over," Wong said.

The situation outside Beijing is worse. "When I was in Guangdong Province three or four years ago, I went to some nightclubs and found the DJs working like waiters, kneeling down to pour wine for customers," she said.

Wong, however, has been able to find fellow DJs who pursue their dreams despite these problems — people who plan activities, do copy writing and run promotions.

"They have a very full workload and are often tired — that's why I want to help them," Wong said.

Wong met her DJ friends in 2006 and 2007, at a time when minimalist techno music was popular. Wong and seven of her friends decided to find a club to call their own.

"Xiao Linfeng [an ex-member of Acupuncture Records] happened to have a studio in a big



factory outside East Fifth Ring Road, so we often gathered there to play our favorite electronic music," Wong said. "Everyone was immersed in the music. The only light was from a lamp on the desk. That feeling was amazing. We felt there was no world outside this room."

The connection was established, and the group's reputation spread.

"Later, almost every week, we'd receive text messages from our friends, asking whether they could come to join our parties," Wong said. "So we thought maybe we could take this music public and let more people experience its charm."

**"Ten years ago when you asked someone to name one or two famous rock 'n' roll bands, few people could do it. This is what the stage electronic music is at now."**

Although at its core electronic music is an underground art, Wong believes it deserves more public exposure.

Wong and her friends organized an electronic party at the old China Doll in Sanlitun. "It was not on a weekend and we didn't do any promotions, but the room was filled with people until 7 am," Wong said. "Even some foreigners said, surprised, 'We never knew there were Chinese DJs who can choose such wonderful music. You should inform me the next time you hold such parties.'"

After the music stopped, Wong and her friends sat on the curbs of Sanlitun, exhausted and happy, and decided to form an electronic label.

"But thinking of a good name was hard," she said. "We later decided on 'Acupuncture Records' because it has a Chinese element to it and a connection to electronic music."

Wong said traditional acupuncture uses silver needles, while

electronic music employs a needle-like stylus. Acupuncture is treatment for the body, and music is treatment for the mind.

Over the years, Acupuncture Records has hosted many parties, some successful, others not so much. The most well known parties are the Halloween party and Intro China electronic music festival.

"The biggest difficulty we face is a lack of understanding from the public," Wong said. "Many in China don't know what a DJ does."

Wong realizes it's difficult to change people's opinions, but she's confident in the future of electronic music in China.

"Like any other new, original industry, electronic music faces various obstacles on its path of development. But it will develop," Wong said.

A few months back, Lantern, Acupuncture Records' club, reopened near Gongti West Gate after closing its Sanlitun location last year.



Acupuncture Records promotes electronic music through events, parties, shows and concerts.



Photos provided by Miao Wong

## Two other music labels:



Carsick Cars

### Maybe Mars Records

Yang Haisong, vocalist and guitarist of PK14, and Michael Pettis, founder of D-22 Club, decided to start this record label in 2007 and dedicate it to innovative young Chinese bands. In the past seven years, it has brought many young bands and musicians to the international stage, such as the rock band Carsick Cars, which joined Sonic Youth for a European tour in Prague and Vienna in 2007. It currently has nearly 30 bands and musicians on its roster.

### Mayouye

This is a new record label founded by May You to promote young folk musicians. For You, a folk musician is like a troubadour who has a deep affection with life. It currently has 15 bands and musicians.

(By He Jianwei)



Ma You (center)



# Rock musicians earning their keep

By Zhang Dongya

There are 10 music festivals every year in Beijing and about 100 around the country, but Midi Festival, now in its 12th year, leads the pack.



Zhang Fan



Photos by Li Lewei

For more than a decade, the Midi Festival has promoted rock 'n' roll.

In May 2000, the first Midi Festival was held at an assembly hall in Beijing Midi School. It was only intended to be a party for the music school's students. Nineteen bands performed, 15 of them comprising Midi students.

"I knew about Woodstock and music festivals in foreign countries, but in the beginning, we did it just for fun," said organizer Zhang Fan. "We had ready-made components such as bands, a venue and an audience, so it was easy to do."

Zhang, 44, founded Midi School in 1993. People called it a "rock school" at the time.

Midi graduates would go on to form several bands, including Tongyang (Miserable Faith) and

Naozhuo (Brain Failure). At the time, very few bands came out of accredited music schools. But Midi's creation of bands led to a demand for music venues in Beijing, especially around Wudaokou.

In 2002, the Midi Festival moved outdoors. In 2004, it was held at the Beijing International Sculpture Park.

More bands signed on, and in 2003, organizers began to invite foreign bands, like Norway's Blister. In 2007, more than 20 foreign bands played at Midi. Also this year, Midi began to make profit and got considerable and stable audience.

"Today's Midi has surpassed my expectations," Zhang said. "I

never meant to develop Midi into a big thing, but I think it happened because of people's openness and tolerance."

In 2009, Midi held its first festival outside Beijing in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province. This year, Midi was staged in Shanghai for three days in May and in Rizhao, Shandong Province in August.

"Midi can bring joy to audiences, and this is the most important thing," Zhang said. "I think there is only one standard to judge whether a music festival is good or not: whether fans leave happy. Except this, all other things can be improved later."

Zhang said they will invite more foreign bands as the festival

grows. So far, they have invited many bands from Europe, and they will target musical groups in North America as well as bands from South Korea and Japan.

Rock, once considered dangerous, has attracted official investment. Midi was granted 500,000 yuan this year by the Beijing government because it develops the "cultural creative industry." It marked the first time a music festival won government backing.

Meanwhile, rock stars are living a better life.

"Rockers lived a hard life in the past. They lived in basements and earned little from singing in bars," Zhang said.

Their success these days "is

gained not by catering to others, but insisting on their dreams," he said. "I think they will only continue to improve."

In 2009, Midi School founded the 1st Chinese Rock Music Awards and set up 11 awards for Chinese rock musicians. Miserable Faith won four awards, including Best Rock Band of the Year, and Cui Jian, dubbed "father of Chinese rock music," was given the Contribution to China Rock Award.

"I don't think rockers are just those who play rock music," Zhang said. "They should be called artists like musicians in other genres, and they should be honored and respected."

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Music Festival

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BEIJING TODAY

# Dream venue for live music

By Wang Yu

Beijing's indie music scene saw its zenith a few years ago, when audiences were growing and venues were being recognized as temples for underground music. But one thing was still lacking: profits. And now, as audiences dwindle, music venues are struggling to survive.



Live House Mako is built in an old jeep factory at Shuangjing.

Photos provided by Mako

## The live center in the south

Unlike other clubs in the city, Mako was built as a theater that was going to be the home for a collaborative drama written by Dongdongqiang and Mako founder Yichi.

The young production team decided to build its own venue for the play because it couldn't book any other proper theater. They convinced friends to invest in the venue, and soon Mako was built in an old factory at Shuangjing that used to make jeeps.

"This place is in the southern part of the city, away from Beijing's more trendy areas. To be just on the outside is what we wanted," Yichi said. The name, Mako whose Chinese name means sparrow, represents the venue's sense of being an outsider.

Yichi works in the TV industry and spends his spare time doing crosstalk. When Mako isn't hosting plays, it's a venue for live music.

Yichi has invested lots of time and resources into bringing quality shows. Musicians such as Xiaojuan, Zhou Yunpeng and Wan Xiaoli have built their names thanks to Mako.

So far, the most successful event was a benefit concert for victims of the earthquake in Yushu, Qinghai Province. It attracted more than 1,000 people, which is remarkable considering the size of most independent clubs. After that, a series of folk concerts in Mako earned it a reputation as a go-to place for folk.

Mako is also known for world music. During Mid-Autumn Festival, it hosted several bands from Mongolia.

"Actually, we didn't mean to be like that," Yichi said. "Mako welcomes all kinds of music. However, the success of the folk shows gave us a reputation."

"But on the other hand, I think



Mako's founder Yichi

it's maybe due to my taste in music. I'm almost 40 now and not that into noisy music anymore."

## Theater and music

Though music gives a venue its reputation, it doesn't pay the bills. Most promoters find it hard to break even.

Mako's revenue as a theater helps. Yichi and his partners registered a production company to make original plays, and they have presented four dramas.

Dramas and pop comedies have become popular among office workers. Advertisements are everywhere, and investors now have the confidence to give money to producers.

But pop comedies aren't real theater, Yichi said. Mostly, they're entertainment based on cheap laughs.

"Such plays don't even qualify as comedies. The jokes and lines are unoriginal – most come from the Internet. So why does anyone pay for something you can get online?" Yichi said.

"To me, tragedies are true dramas. You can still make people laugh, but in the end, tragedies reveal something about ourselves."

Yichi's production team and actors are all professionals. Most are graduates of art or acting schools. Yichi said he thinks his company offers them a good opportunity.

The play *The Raffish Life of Liuli Zhuang* has been performed more than 40 times, and is currently in its second season.

"Usually a play costs 100,000 yuan to produce. But for a studio like us, we can't recoup that money easily, so you have to run a play many times," he said.

The production team is preparing another play, a thriller.

"We have to promote Mako," Yichi said. "Like TV directors who want to eventually make movies, we want to make a play in some bigger theaters in the future. Above all, we have to survive, and I'm confident that we will."

## Venues you shouldn't miss

### D-22

Located in Wudaokou in Beijing's college district, the club established itself as the first stage for young bands. Founder Michal Pettis is a professor at Beijing University and a well known economist. Before arriving in China in 2002, he worked on Wall Street and owned a successful club called Sin.

Pettis' background has helped him find investment for D-22.

But more importantly, the professor thinks about ways to promote Beijing's music. The venue offers opportunities for young musicians Pettis thinks will become stars in the future.

### MAO Livehouse

To most music fans, MAO Livehouse represents the essence of local rock – young punks and noisy crowds gather at this venue near the heart of the city. Li Chi opened MAO in 2007 along with

a Japanese company, just as the music scene was booming.

### Yugongyishan

Like the other early venue founders in the city, Gouzi, owner of Yugongyishan, was influenced by international acts. Impressed with small live shows in Europe, he decided to open a venue in Beijing. With a bar and sofas, Yugongyishan is the most homely of the bars and clubs in town, and has hosted international acts such as Air.



# Du Haibin: Called to record life

By Zhang Dongya  
Chinese

independent film was born in 1990 with Zhang Yuan's release of *Mother*, a film that was banned shortly after.

In the 20 years since, hundreds of independent filmmakers have attempted to record the daily struggles of common people. The lack of opportunities to screen their movies in public has done little to deter this underground school of filmmaking.



**A**long the Railroad was a watershed film in China's history of independent cinema. The film, shot and edited by Du Haibin, was the winner of the first China Independent Film Festival held in Beijing in September 2001.

A critic writing for the well known *Southern Weekly* of Guangzhou called it "a sensation at the film festival that overshadowed its competitors."

That victory marked Chinese independent film's coming of age and opened the door for new documentaries and independent dramas.

Du, born in 1972 in Baoji, Shaanxi Province, never aspired to become a filmmaker. As a youth, he turned his attention to painting in hopes of being admitted to an academy of fine art.

After failing the entrance exams of several such academies, he went to Guangzhou to look for work. He found a job with a design company, which had the absurd requirement that Du and its other employees lie to clients and introduce themselves as college graduates.

The lies made Du feel like a cheat and inspired him to try to enter school once more.

At that time, both the Beijing Film Academy and the Central Academy of Drama were recruiting new students. Du was admit-

ted to the former in 1996.

The Beijing Film Academy only accepted students younger than 24; at 23 years old, Du was four years the senior of most of his classmates – a fact that caused him mild embarrassment.

"But being older meant I had more life experience than my classmates. That's why I decided not to waste my time at college," he said.

Du watched many films, including some by independent filmmaker Zhang Yuan, who Du cites as one of his greatest influences.

In his third year, he collaborated with a few classmates to found a small film society and began recording.

He shot his first documentary, *My Mom and My Dad*, in 1999. The film followed a young man from Shaanxi who came to wander the city.

On the last winter holiday before graduation, he encountered a gang of vagrants living near the Baoji Train Station when he returned home for Spring Festival. The experience inspired his second film, *Along the Railway*, which recorded the story of such vagrants as they entered the new millennium.

In addition to winning the Best Documentary award at the First Chinese Independent Film Festival, *Along the Railway* also

**"I'm something of a fatalist. I believe things will happen, and all we can do is face them head on."**



Director Du Haibin

**"As a documentary filmmaker, my only concern is making new films. Whether they get screened or not is none of my business."**

received an honorable mention at the 2001 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival.

Since then, Du has produced a new documentary each year.

In 2006, he recorded the hard lives of granite miners in Stone Mountain, which won the Best Documentary award at the 2007 Pusan International Film Festival. Three years later, his documentary *1428* about life after the Wenchuan Earthquake won the Best Documentary Award at the 2009 Venice Film Festival.

"All the experience I have accumulated through the years, especially in college, tends to burst out in my creations. Shooting documentaries isn't like shooting dramas or feature films – it's something you are called to do," Du said.

Rather than focus on genres, Du prefers to focus on social issues.

"I'm something of a fatalist. I believe things will happen, and all we can do is face them head on."

The decade-long boom in Chinese independent film may owe much to the availability of cheap digital video recorders.

"As part of the generation born in the 1970s, I've had the advantage of growing up with digital video and similar equipment. In the past, documentaries were the work of dozens of people working with huge machines. Today all

it takes is a decent digital video camera," Du said.

Most of his award-winning documentaries were shot with consumer-grade digital video recorders.

Despite his success, documentary filmmaking remains little more than a hobby for Du and other filmmakers.

"You can't make a living in this country by shooting documentaries," Du said. Like most labors of love, it depends on the support of a second job. For Du, that job is supervising film shoots for other people.

Getting this work screened is another major hurdle for independent filmmakers. Even if there are more venues today than there were in 2001, Du remains pessimistic about the industry's future.

"I don't see much hope for the public screening of documentaries in mainstream cinemas, even if places like cafes and arts spaces are willing to be hosts. Some universities are screening Chinese documentaries, but their participation is passive," Du said.

There is also not a bureau to examine documentaries by the government.

"But that's not important. As a documentary filmmaker, my only concern is making new films. Whether they get screened or not is none of my business," Du said.



Du Haibin's works focus on social issues. He does not plan his subjects in advance, but shoots what he is called to.

Photos provided by Duhaibin Studio





## Indie is experimental

**Guang Yu**, graphic designer

Q: What is the indie spirit?

A: Experimental. I do not have any favorite independent music.

Q: Do you have any favorite independent music?

A: There are many artists I appreciate, including Cornelius [a Japanese recording artist and producer], Kim Hoorhooy [a Norwegian electronic musician, graphic designer, illustrator, filmmaker and writer], A Gao [a

local folk musician], Stereobab [a British alternative band], Miss Hawaii [a Japanese electronic musician] and Dou Wei [a pioneer of Chinese rock music].

Q: Where do you usually go to attend performances or exhibitions?

A: I seldom go to the galleries, live houses or theaters, but I do go to several bookstores, such as Timezone 8, Book Art and Pageone.

(By He Jiamen)



## Indie is persistence

**Wei Minghui**, founder of Memory Re-design

Q: What is the indie spirit?

A: Persistence. No matter what others say, you have to stick to your own independent thoughts.

Q: Why do you think indie musician, filmmaker or artist do you like? Why?

A: I like Anton Corbijn, who photographed rock stars in the 1980s.

Q: Where do you like to hang out in Beijing?

A: A store called Weibo Zhiyuan in 798 Art Zone and Sculpting in Time in the 753 Art Zone.

(By Wei Ying)



## Indie is freedom

**Kou Jianxun**, founder of DeKou handmade soap

Q: What is the indie spirit?

A: I think "indie" means to persist in what you like.

Q: Which indie musician, filmmaker or artist do you like? Why?

A: I don't have a very clear definition of "indie" artists. Aren't artists all independent? Personally, I like the indie musician, filmmaker or artist who is true to himself.

Q: Where do you like to hang out in Beijing?

A: MAO Livehouse. It has a lot of good performances.

(By Wei Ying)

# Voices of Indie Beijing

By Zhao Hongyi

The word indie carries much more meaning than mere independence. Indie culture includes not only the city's creative pioneers, but people from all walks of life who seek their ideals and an identity outside the one shaped by schools and media outlets.

In this issue, *Beijing Today* interviewed several top musicians, publishers, directors, designers and shop owners from the indie scene to find out what the scene and its culture means to them.



CFP Photo



## Indie is independent

big they become, they are only a name with no identity.

Q: Who are your favorite indie artists? Why?

A: I would name several artists such as Li Yang, the independent filmmaker who made *Beijing Blues* in 2005, and some indie musicians, and some modern dancers such as Li Ke, Chao Ke and Tao Ye. I met them and was deeply impressed by their insight, commitment and honesty. They never give in to the dirty problems of life, and use that adversity to fuel their artistic expression.

Q: What are some must-visit places in Beijing?

A: Years ago, the Bookworm was my favorite. Today, it's lost its atmosphere to fame. I haven't found another bookstore to replace it. Regarding performing venues, I'm quite into Nine Theater and the art space at No. 46 Fanglin Hutong. Both link young artists and audiences with world-renowned professional artists. They are open to the public and really support themselves, and that's why they can maintain such a high level of art.

(By Huang Daohou)

## Indie is attitude

**Hou Jiawen**, artist

Q: What do you think is the indie spirit?

A: It's an attitude toward daily life that makes us brave enough to take risks and willing to face difficulties and challenges. It's a kind of attitude that is not about making money – one that favors bringing wealth to society and teaching people to love themselves, directors or artists you appreciate?

A: Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski and Swedish director Ingmar Bergman are the two people I most admire. They use film to explore the human condition and life. Their works inspire viewers to consider earnestly the nature of humanity and life.

Q: Are there any cultural places, such as live houses, galleries or bookstores, that you like in Beijing?

A: I like cultural places only if they promote culture. Galleries in 798 Art Zone and Timezone 8 Bookstore are my favorites.

(By Wei Xi)



## Indie is expression

**Zhang Fan**, founder of Miti Festival

Q: What is the indie spirit?

A: I think people who are tagged with "indie spirit" are those who insist on their own ideas. They are able to bear solitude and frustration. Even when they are misunderstood, they still enjoy what they are doing and take pride in their career.

Q: Are there any musicians or bands you think could be tagged "independent," and why?

A: I like Miserable Faith and Omnipotent Youth Society. The former

started in the Miti School and graduated in 1999, and the latter is an old rock band from Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. Both are typical Chinese rock bands that convey love and hate in their music. They succeed because they work hard and have a passion for their music.

Q: Which places in Beijing have an "independent" feel?

A: There are many of them: D-22, MAO Livehouse, 13 Club and the Star Live. All the bars and clubs are bastions of independent music in China.

(By Zhang Dongmei)



# Documentaries as a window into society



By Han Manman

Chinese independent documentary is in the early stages of rapid evolution. To support the young art, film organizations are shooting up all over the country – especially in the capital.

CNEX, or “Chinese Next,” is a Beijing-based non-profit focused on two things: China and documentaries.

Its founder and CEO Ben Tsiang is determined to turn CNEX into the top promoter of documentaries about social enclaves across the nation.

Ben Tsiang is determined to turn CNEX into the top promoter of Chinese documentaries.

Photos provided by Wang Lei

## Making documentary

Before he began shooting and supporting documentaries, the 42-year-old Tsiang was an IT entrepreneur. Among his achievements was co-founding the popular Internet portal Sina.com.

But his true calling was documentary film.

“I was a big fan of documentaries during my school years,” Tsiang said. Having grown up in Taiwan and studied abroad in the US, Tsiang used documentaries as a vehicle to understand the roots of Chinese society.

The more documentaries he watched, the more he wanted to get involved by making his own.

The chance came in late 2004 with the broad availability of consumer-grade digital video recorders.

“Internet access at that time also gave people a way to share their creativity online,” Tsiang said.

Tsiang said the power of streaming video has surpassed that of the written word, making documentary films the most powerful medium for nurturing intellectuals.

In 2004, most Chinese documentaries were made for TV and focused on human nature and poor rural villages. Tsiang said he and his friends wanted to make a documentary about the differences between Chinese culture on the mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

“But later, we felt it was hard to use one documentary to show a complete picture of the Chinese people, so we decided to set up a documentary organization,” Tsiang said.

He quit his job at Sina.com to found CNEX with two other partners in late 2006.

## 10 years, 100 films

CNEX supports Chinese documentary filmmakers by organizing and coordinating international cultural exchange.

Tsiang said the project’s 10-year goal is to tell the story of contemporary China by producing and screening 100 indie films.

Under the plan, CNEX will work with non-profit and corporate sponsors to arrange grants for 10 Chinese filmmakers each year. A different theme will be selected each year to reflect a different area of Chinese culture. The theme for this year’s qualifying films is youth and citizenship.

The project is currently in its sixth year, and some of the documentaries it has supported have gone on to win awards at international competitions.

“If CNEX has a second 10-year project, it will probably follow the same format of 100 independent films in 10 themes,” he said.

“If the project continues, it will be like an album to record China’s past and present.”

However, like all groups that want to promote independent film in China, funding remains a serious obstacle.

Tsiang said CEOs prefer to donate money to places where there is immediate benefit, like school construction, rather than to independent film, which is more conceptual in its value.

The other problem CNEX faces is a lack of producers. Tsiang said that while

the Chinese market has many good documentary directors, it is hampered by a lack of experienced producers capable of sending those documentaries abroad.

“Without a good, bilingual producer who is familiar with the overseas independent film market, it will be hard for Chinese documentaries to get worldwide attention,” he said.

## Changing tastes

Tsiang said the world’s interest in Chinese documentary is changing.

Documentaries about China’s minority groups and poverty-stricken villages have always been very popular with international viewers, but their interests are changing in recent years.

“Although injustice and humanity are still the two most important topics, foreign viewers are becoming more curious about contemporary China, its culture and society,” Tsiang said.

He said films about the middle and upper class are more popular on the international market, which wants to know more about who is driving China’s rise.

“I would advise Chinese documentary directors to pay more attention to such themes in the future,” he said.

In addition to its efforts to send Chinese documentary abroad, CNEX is trying to bring foreign documentary producers to China.

Last year, it held a forum to invite major documentary production companies, such as the BBC, NHK, Discovery Channel and National Geographic Channel, to invest in Chinese independent film and help it be screened abroad.

## Where to watch independent films

### Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA)

Located in the Dashanzi Art District of Beijing, this contemporary arts venue was founded in 2007 by Guy and Myriam Ullens. UCCA showcases a variety of indie, shorts and feature-length films, as well as documentaries. The films are primarily directed, written and produced by Chinese nationals. If you enjoy contemporary art and film, UCCA is an excellent choice for film screenings.

### Moma Broadway Cinema

This venue, which regularly hosts international film festivals, has made enormous strides since opening in November 2009. Moma’s initial aim was to become Beijing’s main platform for European cinema and art house films. It frequently screens local and international films and hosts filmmaking workshops. Most of the films it selects are art films that viewers will never be able to find in mainstream Chinese cinemas.

### Iberia Center for Contemporary Art

Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, the first art center established in China by the International Art & Culture Foundation (IAC) of Spain, is an academic organization involved in research, education, publication and collection of contemporary art. It especially values independent film and video, which are the most forceful and dynamic parts of contemporary art. The Center maintains its own archive of independent films and videos.

# Breaking down the boundaries of design

By He Jianwei

Among China's top graphic designers, Guang Yu stands out.

It's not merely because he is China's first and only winner of the Tokyo Type Directors Club (TDC) Awards, but because his work is like a kaleidoscope, giving people a chance to see the ordinary in an extraordinary way.



Dream Experiment

The 34-year-old designer Guang Yu founded the MEWE design group with his classmates He Jun and Liu Zhizhi. Since then, the streets of Beijing have been swarmed by the group's posters, clothing and accessories.

But setting up a studio was not Guang's goal when he graduated with a degree in graphic design from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2002.

Guang spent two years working in advertising before he graduated. As a junior in college, he became fascinated by a course in printing.

"It was too expensive for me to make print works, so I found a part-time job in an advertisement company. I changed jobs several times during those four years," Guang said.

At first, he worked in a small design company with only eight people. "It was a tough job. I stayed up late every day and slept on the bus," he said. "I felt excited to see my work in print, but I left the company because my clients couldn't appreciate good design."

He also worked as art director for a magazine for half a year, earning substantial pay.

But Guang missed design.

"My dream was to create good designs, and to found a studio that followed my own principles," he said.

China has a strong inclination toward design plagiarism. Some designers copy masters in Europe, Japan and the US. But Guang sought something that was Chinese from its origins: not a foreign design with a Chinese mask.

One of his important works was an album and sign for N12, a group exhibition of 12 young Chinese artists. In the design, he used the Song typeface, a standard typeface for Chinese, to write the parts that needed to be in the Latin alphabet.

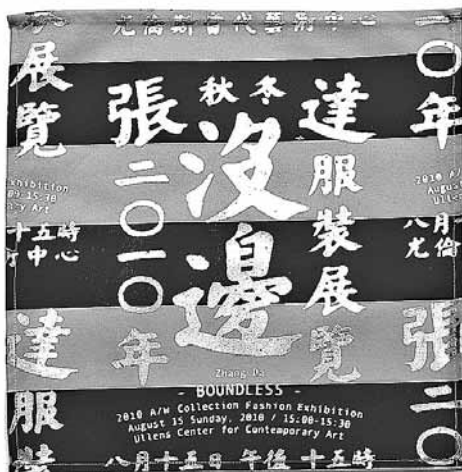
No foreign designers did this.

"Modern designs that mix Chinese ideographs and the Latin alphabet tend to be terrible because they are set in very different typefaces. The juxtaposition is not harmonious," he said.

"I used the same typeface for both sets of glyphs because it reflected contemporary Chinese values of haste, immediacy and impermanence." The design won the Tokyo TDC Awards.

In 2006, Guang designed an album for the artist Qiu Xiaofei. Guang treated the book as a story, called it Heilongjiang Box. Qiu's paintings dealt with his memory of being a young boy and his first impressions of Beijing.

Guang put the invitation for



Posters and invitations for Zhang Da's fashion show

the exhibition inside it. Held together with a rusty pin, the invitation looks like an old photo. There are also things from childhood in the book, such as old pens and marbles.

"It is everything I liked and collected when I was young," Guang said. "Many artists would like to make a thick and heavy album, like an epitaph. But Qiu allowed me to make an album related to the city's collective memory. We hoped, whether people visited the exhibition or not, the album would help them fondly recall the past."

In 2007, He Jun left the studio, and Guang and Liu found another studio called To Meet You. That studio is pioneering a new language for Chinese design that is not linked to a specific aesthetic, but rather draws its strength from a mixture of everyday icons.

Last year, Guang worked with fashion designer Zhang Da, who has been inspired by traditional Chinese techniques and an interest in disposable culture. Zhang invited Guang to design a post and invitation card for his brand exhibition.

Unlike his previous design, Guang drew inspiration from the designs dating back to the Republic of China (1911-1949), creating traditional characters printed on cotton. "I wanted to break away from contemporary work. I love the designs of the Republic of China, because at that time they were more natural and functional," he said.

Many of his clients are artists or art organizations, but that doesn't make negotiation any easier. "Artists are no different from other clients. Sometimes they are even more stubborn, because they see themselves as the ultimate authority," he said.

**"My dream was to create good designs, and to found a studio that followed my own principles."**



Heilongjiang Box



Photos provided by Guang Yu



## Other designers

Chen Jiaojiao and Peng Yangjun

This graphic design duo works for a magazine. Chen is the editor-in-chief and Peng is the creative director.

One of their famous designs is a box with a book, two pamphlets, an old train ticket, a ring, old photos, four marbles, a dummy Mig 15 aircraft, a red scarf and a letter. They compiled the work in 2009 using a series of interviews with people and photos dating back to the 1940s.

Liu Zhizhi

Liu is the co-founder of To Meet You with Guang Yu. In his work, he plays detective and collects details and reconstructs the story through reasonable and logical analysis.

He is like a chef who has to calculate the balance and relationship between paper, printing, text and typography to make a tasty soup.





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# The homecoming of an independent designer

By Chu Meng

Clothes are an external reflection of one's personality and inner restraint. Likewise, the city's indie fashion designers shoulder responsibilities to explore Beijing's personality.

**Z**hang Chi has been a busy man. Recently returned from a ready-to-wear fashion show in Paris, he's found himself under the spotlight, a darling of fashion journalists from Beijing and Shanghai.

And that suits the young designer just fine.

After eight and a half years working overseas – especially in England, where he started his own brand – he's accustomed to the frenetic pace required for success.

Zhang, in his 30s, returned to China in 2008 to start his own business, which he confidently named after himself: "Chi Zhang." He combines British and Italian styles, and seems to have a mature understanding of his work. He said his brand was profitable in just its second year.

"And we're leaving this place for a bigger studio," Zhang said. "This small office can't hold the fast-growing company and its crew members," Zhang said.

Zhang's ambition is the result of success. His 2011/12 Fall and Winter men's collection, called Rebirth, included gaudy diamond masks that the designer said were symbolic of humanity's ability to persevere through hardship.

"I've witnessed so many natural and man-made disasters recently, like the Japanese tsunami, the Libyan civil war and the high-speed train collision in China," he said.

His collection tries to present glamour that is undergoing change: out of sadness and death, an elegant beauty – yet still very starkly presented.

"I interpret human transformation in fashion," Zhang said. "I hope my creation can represent human struggle from bottom to top, from moral decadence to spiritual elegance."

His bold, daring designs are the result of many years of training combined with a natural inclination toward fashion.

When Zhang went to Europe in 2000, he knew almost nothing about design. But ever since he was a child, he loved to dress up like fashion icons, and his willingness to learn inspired devotion to the trade.

During his first two years abroad, he realized fashion would be a vocation. In 2002, when he enrolled in college in the UK, he decided to major in dress design.

Italian designs, from clothing to bags to shoes, were very popular in the UK at the time. Italians cherish delicate artistry – "they see fashion as a religion, and do it like scientific research," Zhang said. It deeply impressed him, and would later shape his work.

"Meanwhile, London is open, tolerant and diversified," he said. "It's like a mini UN, to some extent. Therefore, I started my own business there early after graduation. Luckily, because London had so many independent designers, my works sold well."

He was lured back to Beijing in 2008 after a conversation with a former classmate. "That classmate told me that they saw enormous changes in Beijing, but compared with European countries, the local fashion industry was blank and undeveloped," Zhang



Zhang Chi



2011/12 Fall and Winter men's collection, called Rebirth

Photos provided by Zhang Chi

said. "But there was a great demand for original local designers, so he suggested I return. And I did."

During the past three years in Beijing, Zhang has been repeatedly asked: How does an independent fashion designer make money in China?

The key, Zhang said, is diversifying into international markets. He himself has channels in the UK, France, Germany and Singapore.

"In China, when consumers see clothing with new concepts or designs, they judge them by their practicality," Zhang said. "But in New York, London or Milan, clothing is judged by the spirit it conveys."

Zhang doesn't like to spend a lot of money on advertising because he believes works should be able to speak for themselves, season after season.

"I just show my works to the public in an easily digestible way," he said. "When your designs are original, refreshing and endearing, success is bound to follow. Promotions are meaningless."



## Buyers define city's fashion future



Mao Tingting

Buyers' shops dedicated to independent designers first

appeared on the mainland in 1999, when prominent Hong Kong fashion retailer I.T. Group opened its first store in Shanghai.

A buyers' shop is something like a Mecca for those with a sharp eye for fashion, catering to individuals with a distinct sense of style and bringing them new brands that are not readily available locally.

In the more than 10 years since the concept was introduced, the number of consumers of avant-garde fashion has grown considerably, leading to a proliferation of buyers' shops. Chinese labels have gone global, too, and Beijing has been at the heart of this development.

Mao Tingting, 29, was one of Beijing's first "buyers." In 2006, she opened the avant-garde designer store PUFF in Jianwai SOHO.

PUFF, a 15-square-meter store with black-and-white leopard stripes as wallpaper, sells clothing and accessories from herself and Japanese designers, such as last year's cross-border design Converse shoes by Rei Kawakubo and Tsumori Chisato's limited edition women's shirts.

Hundreds of products by Japanese design masters, such as Junya Watanabe and Jun Takahashi, are available. But Mao is more proud of young independent designers with brands such as BAPY and BAPE Shark.

"A buyer's tastes decide the soul of his or her store, and all the stores together offer a sample of a city's current taste in fashion," Mao said. "These can only exist when a city has grown to develop an elevated appreciation for design and fashion."

Mao said she wants to see more local independent designers blossom.

"As an independent designer myself, I want our stores to be able to offer a sample of the city's best independent designers," she said.

Mao describes herself as having an innate sense of fashion. She bought her first pair of earrings at the age of 5 and soon became fascinated with the woolen Japanese coats and one-piece French dresses in her mother's closet.

"I could watch my mom sew and knit a sweater for hours," she said. "No one taught her what to do – her designs came from instinct. She used to sketch her own templates on old newspapers using chalk."

Having inherited her mother's talent, Mao began collecting fashion pieces that met her tastes. They were usually sharp, sensitive and usual. Starting from the age of 18, she began trying to design clothing.

She accumulated clothing and accessories for 15 years, until her house could hold no more. That's when Mao, a 23-year-old fresh out of Beijing Foreign Studies University, decided to open PUFF.

The store, while small, was an unexpected success. Mao's products were quickly snapped up by local buyers, many of whom became loyal customers.

Also, "some pieces from marginal Japanese brands sold for five times their initial cost, and the requests just kept coming in," Mao said. "That was when I decided to teach myself to become a full-time 'buyer' with a focus on Japanese products."

"A successful buyer has to be energetic, open-minded, sensitive to new things and able to appreciate how fashion is part of a modern lifestyle," she said, though her success with Chinese customers may have more to do with her own aesthetic sense.

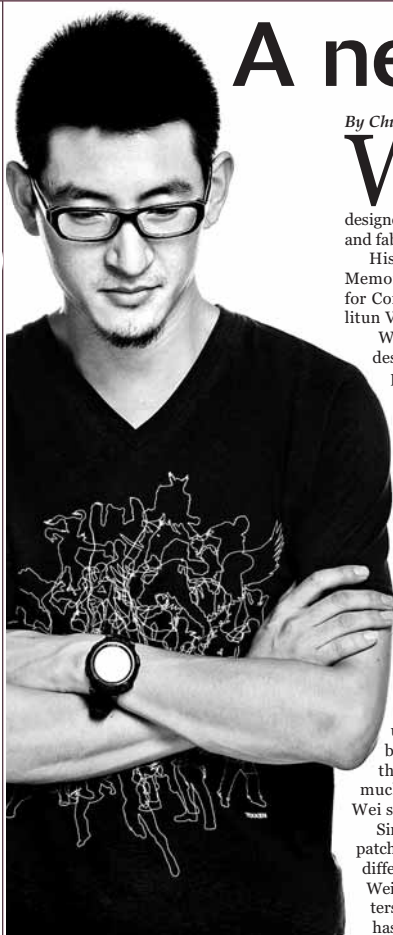
China's fashion industry is still low on the learning curve, Mao said. After all these years, "a real fashion atmosphere that eyes local independent clothing designers is only just beginning to form."

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Fashion designers

BEIJING TODAY Editor: Chu Meng Designer: Deng Ning





Wei Minghui Photos provided by Wei Minghui

# A new life for recycled cloth

By Chu Meng

**W**ei Minghui, one of the city's most dynamic independent product designers, said he thinks of himself not as a designer but a regenerator of recycled cloth and fabric.

His brand of eco-bags and suitcases, Memory, can be seen at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) and Sanlitun Village.

Wei established Memory and his design studio in Beijing in 2007. Its products include retro handbags, shoulder bags, shopping and magazine bags, purses and suitcases, made from recycled cloth and plastic, which embodies the concept of redesign. He aims to arouse public awareness of the environment with his work.

Wei and his team collect used banners, posters, flags and large tourist bags made with eco-cloth or plastic fabrics. Then, Wei clips shapes and pieces from different collections and stitches them together into an integrated product.

"I produce one thing out of many other existing things, which other people think of as useless. I don't create new things, but make new arrangements of old things. I hate one-off stuff. It's too much of a luxury for Chinese people," Wei said.

Since the collage patterns are entirely patchwork, each product is completely different and unique. A lot of times, Wei's street collections feature characters, slogans and patterns. One product has the slogan "establish a harmonious community together" on it, and another shows "no parking."

Wei is good at using contrasting colors to exaggerate visual impact. Tricolored men's office bags in red, yellow and green are of his best-sellers.

"I think people love them because I make government slogans look foolish by cutting and pasting them together in funny ways," he said. "Someone else must feel those slogans are foolish, too. Others



Suitcase made with recycled materials.

are just totally bored by their work and daily life."

Wei was born in 1979 in Harbin and moving to Beijing in early 1999. Soon after, he was admitted to the School of Decorating Art at the Central Academy of Art, now part of Tsinghua University. After graduating, he started his career in book binding and cover design. Five years later, he became the director of an advertisement company's graphic design center.

He started Memory in 2009. It quickly won him fame among independent Chinese designers.

"The idea coincided with Beijing's massive campaign against plastic bags before the Olympic Games in 2008," he said. "The government suddenly didn't allow supermarkets, shops or restaurants to offer free

plastic bags to their customers out of environmental concerns."

The city gave him a business idea, but also public recognition of a cause. Wei said if his brand had not been developed in Beijing, it wouldn't have worked as well. The labels on his products read "Made in Beijing."

Designs made from recycled products are common in Europe, but Wei is considered a pioneer in Beijing. "A big part of my work is working in all kinds of warehouses, like ones in printing houses and low-budget clothing factories, as well as recyclable garbage halls in garbage dumps of residential communities to find materials we need," he said. "The latter is sometimes where our most surprising findings come from."

On one hand, it's hard for Wei to find materials. But on the other hand, it's frustrating to see examples of excessive luxury, such as ornate mooncake wrappers.

"China has become an excessive consumption market," Wei said. "For some, over-priced products and over-wrapped gifts are symbols of a higher social status. However, no one wants to pay the bill for blindly wasting resources, which have always been scarce in our country."

Forty percent of customers who buy Memory's products are foreigners in Beijing or tourists. Chinese people have a notion that secondhand products are dirty.

Wei said not every piece of old clothing is fit for use. Some are too tattered or embarrassingly outdated. But a lot of times, fabric can be easily reused.

"This is a recycled design anyone can make at home," Wei said. "Sometimes, we have to pay for environmental protection, but a lot more times, just by being aware of recycled products, we've made a contribution to the environment."

## Souvenir designer who saved a museum with her works

Next to the Starbucks on the restaurant street Lotus Lane in Houhai is an inconspicuous 35-square-meter designer shop called Guanfu Museum Gift Shop, owned by designer Guo Yangyang.

This small store may not seem like much, but it saved a museum.

The Guanfu Classical Art Museum, owned by Ma Weidu, includes 4 million yuan's worth of exhibits and collections, but it was in danger of closing down years ago.

Guo's shop, with its decorative souvenirs, handicrafts and paintings sold at reasonable prices, quietly earned money for

Ma's museum, keeping it afloat.

One of the items is a coarse paper box containing three handmade organic soaps (60 yuan), each scented using ingredients from traditional medicine such as wormwood, cypress, fleece flower root, red adzuki beans and ginger.

"Expensive imported essential oils are extremely popular these days, but few people remember that their scents are already used in herbal medicines," Guo said. "By turning them into soap, they retain their medicinal effects."

The shop also has red silk baby shoes, mineral stones, incense sticks scented with

water or cold plums and environmentally friendly silk bags embroidered with names from the traditional Chinese calendar.

"If you've visited Guanfu Museum, you'll find that our products are artistic derivatives of the collections there," Guo said. The boxes and wrapping paper used in the shop bear a signature pattern of red Chinese lions on a blue background, inspired by a Song Dynasty ceramic bowl Ma collected in the 1990s.

She also hopes her products convey artistic sensibility and cultural elements, unlike the trinkets found at the gift shops of state-owned museums.



Guo Yangyang

## Jewelry design couple pleasing customers one ring at a time

Wang Qian and Zhang Shaofei, both 28 years old and graduates of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, are a well known couple in the jewelry design circle. They've built not only a solid foundation for their careers, but also nurture a spirit of independence and self-awareness.

Opened in 2010, the online Angs Primary Design School is the couple's independent jewelry brand, the idea of which comes from the younger generation's tendency to interpret traditional and popular culture according to their own perspectives. Qian and Wang attempt to create humanizing designs through a simple and warm design language.

"Our main daily work is to design wed-

ding rings, which sounds amazing but in fact is more tedious than reading a doctoral dissertation," Wang said. "Commercial standards require us to make the diamond appear much larger than it actually is, sometimes



Necklace called Blood

Photos provided by Wang Qian

that ruins the work's artistic design. I am not interested in it at all."

But he persists because the couple needs money to pursue their artistic jewelry designs, which are costly and not profitable in the short term. It's the same problem that most independent designers face: the balance between commercial interests and artistry.

A single ring requires a designer to pay strict attention to the height of the diamond, the overall weight relation to the jewels and every notch and curve. The best designers are obsessive-compulsive about their works. So it is with Wang and Qian, who focus on every detail, but at the risk of losing efficiency.

So far, their hard work has resulted in



Wang Qian and Zhang Shaofei

a patent of an inner-wall design.

"We are all kids with dreams of changing the world," Wang said. "Never forget children's dreams. They are not ridiculous at all. They're the original inspiration behind our designs."

# Pop art meets consumerism

By Wei Xi

Casual Locations is an art group that transforms people's ideas into designs, offering insight into the creative process and the marketability of art.

Every weekday, members of Casual Locations post a question on their Weibo such as, "If you could domesticate an animal, which one you would like to ride on?" or "What habitual gesture from your teacher has given you the most lasting impression?" The person who replies with the most imaginative answer gets to see their answer transformed into a drawing.

The drawings are later put on cups, T-shirts, postcards, coasters and other products.

The idea came from Hou Jiawen, lead artist of Casual Locations. Hou said several years ago that he became obsessed with collecting other people's answers, so wherever he went, he took a notebook with him, asking strangers questions and inviting them to draw a picture as an answer.

To his surprise, strangers were very enthusiastic about this, and most of the answers were inspiring.

"So I thought I might put their interesting ideas into my creations," said Hou, who believes the value of a work should not be determined by its price or the popularity of an artist. "Art is better if it communicates something to the audience."

The Chinese name for Casual Locations - Mi Nian - expresses the meaning that each one of us has the ability to come up with interesting ideas. These ideas may be small, but when gathered together, they're strong and powerful.

Casual Locations, however, is still a small operation. It orders only 20 to 30 items from factories for each design, priced at less than 100 yuan each. For bigger works, it orders three to five copies of a product.

The group was formed last June and currently has 14 members.

"One of our friends invested in our program in 2010, with which we opened a cafe and art gallery in Xiamen and an art studio in Beijing," said artist Ma Yan.

At the moment, all products are sold in the cafe, studio and online.

From time to time, Casual Locations invites artists from home and abroad to give exhibitions.

## Casual Locations art studio in Beijing

Where: Room 1705, Building 13, western part of Jianwai Soho, Chaoyang District

Open: 9:30 am - 6:30 pm

Tel: 5869 5673

Website: minian.taobao.com

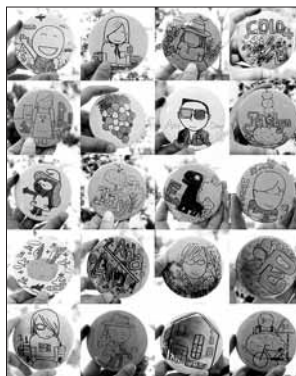


Hand-painted cup

Photos provided by Casual Locations



Hou Jiawen, lead artist



Badge

## Skeleton jewelry

By Wei Xi

Most people might see death as an end to life, but to Yin Xiangkun, it's the start of eternity.

Twenty-three-year-old Yin is the co-owner of Skeleton, an original jewelry shop. He has combined his special interest in anatomy with his skills in craft design and production.

Among the items he uses are skeletons of fish and birds, butterfly wings and precious stones. He draws detailed designs of each product according to his interpretation before setting to work.

Some limited edition items sell for up to 5,000 yuan.

Recently, Yin has also created some pieces for an exhibition that he says are not for sale.

### Skeleton

Where: E03, Qixing Lu, Dashanzi Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

Open: 10:30 am - 6 pm

Tel: 13521684260



Inside Skeleton



Earrings



Feather jewelry Photos provided by Skeleton

## Online shopping mall for original designs



Birdhouse

By Wei Xi

For anyone not satisfied with traveling from boutique to boutique for different original designs, Wowsai.com may be your one-stop shop.

Founded two years ago, Wowsai claims to have 10,000 different original products from 500 designers. These products include jewelry, accessories, clothes, toys and even cakes, and the prices range from a yuan to as much as 10,000 yuan.

Each item sold on wowsai.com has a limited quantity. Unlike in traditional boutiques, designers can maintain their online stores by giving detailed descriptions of their products and selling them directly to consumers.

Amateurs are allowed to present their products won Wowsai as well.

At the moment, the site does not charge for launching a store, but takes 8 percent of each sale.

Website: wowsai.com



Necklace

Photos provided by wowsai.com



# Indie designers ready for greatness

By Annie Wei

The increasing popularity of indie products has made the environment ripe for up-and-coming designers, but many do not grasp what it takes to succeed.

Being a designer doesn't mean slapping together what one thinks is cool. It requires a clear idea of concepts, target consumers and a product line.

*Beijing Today* has been fortunate to make acquaintances with some of the city's best young designers in the last two years, people who pursue their dreams while navigating the marketplace. Here, we look back on a couple of designers who have caught our attention in the past.

## Jiang Xue Zi: bringing function and beauty to ceramic kitchenware

Ceramics serve a practical purpose, but Jiang Xue Zi is among a special breed of ceramists who truly believe in the artistic quality of the craft.

She said her passion was ignited 15 years ago after touring a local market.

"When I worked in Beijing in 1995, I visited Panjiayuan antique market every weekend and started becoming interested in ancient ceramics," she said.

After visiting a modern ceramic exhibition by Chinese ceramist Zhu Legeng at the National Art Museum of China in 1997, she realized ceramics could be artistic.

A trip to the first biannual international ceramic exhibition in Icheon, South Korea in 2001 showed Jiang how ceramic kitchenware is linked with dining culture in South Korea.

She saw how South Korea was trying to reinvent ceramic design, and thought China could do the same.

After making up her mind to study ceramic design, Jiang enrolled to Hongik University in South Korea, graduating last year



Designer Jiang Xue Zi



Jiang Xue Zi's ceramic  
Photos by Xiao Kun

with a Master's degree. Her study focuses on daily ceramic product design.

Jiang currently teaches at a university in Shanghai. She also rents a workshop in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, known as the "porcelain capital."

After studying in South Korea for six years, Jiang has learned that being a designer requires being a craftsman and an artist at the same time.

In South Korea, ceramists work with food curators to present an eclectic dining experience – "livable art," Jiang said.

"To design and produce ceramic products and use them in daily life, to make sense of their function and beauty," she said.

Her lily series of food containers are not only beautiful, but expresses her views toward life.

Jiang uses light and plain colors, simple and neat patterns. The highlight is the handle, a piece of processed wood approximates nature.

All products are handmade by Jiang herself.

## Online store for new designers

Zhang Na, a young Beijing woman who established her apparel brand (Na) too in Shanghai in April 2008, launched another line, Fakenatoo, on Taobao in May.

The timing was right for an online brand, Zhang said.

(Na) too was only available at upscale department stores in Shanghai and Beijing. "Online brands try to build a closer connection between itself and customers," Zhang said.

Offline brands are also limited by location and department store policies.

She said she has gotten orders from second- and third-tier cities in addition to Beijing and Shanghai.

Zhang has noticed an emerging market for online brands. "People who buy online have started to upgrade from buying inexpensive products to buying quality and unique products," she said.

She believes that there will be even more online buyers interested in quality products.

Fakenatoo, open for four months, carries works by three designers, including Zhang, and plans to release 70 to 80 products each season.

Selling clothes online and offline are two different things. Compared to (Na) too, Fakenatoo offers more casual styles at friendly prices.

Although Zhang's online and offline brands are totally separate, her designs share the same belief that people make the clothes; clothes do not make a person.

A customer truly feels a design only when he or she has put on a piece of (Na) too or Fakenatoo clothing. That keeps customers coming back.

Website: fakenatoo.taobao.com



Designer Zhang Na  
Photo provided by  
Zhang Na

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那些事儿

For Holiday  
长假7天那些事儿

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28 处初秋最美的目的地  
50 部名人私藏书籍+电影+CD  
夏秋换季“怀旧”你能“秋冬卸妆”18 问  
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